

IN THE MATTER OF
MICHELLE L. NORRIS, LCPC
CERTIFICATE NO. AC0340
RESPONDENT

* BEFORE THE MARYLAND BOARD OF
* PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS AND
* THERAPISTS
* CASE NO. 2014-58

* * * * *

FINAL CONSENT ORDER

The Maryland Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists (the "Board") charged Michelle L. Norris, LCPC (the "Respondent"), license number: LC0931, under the Maryland Professional Counselors and Therapists Act (the "Act"), Md. Code Ann., Health Occ. ("H.O.") §§ 17-101 *et seq.* (2014 Repl. Vol.). Specifically, the Board charged the Respondent with violating the following provisions:

H.O § 17-509. Denial, probation, suspension or revocation of certificate applicant or holder

Subject to the hearing provisions of § 17-511 of this subtitle, the Board, on the affirmative vote of a majority of its members then serving, may deny a license or certificate to any applicant, place any licensee or certificate holder on probation, reprimand any licensee or certificate holder, or suspend or revoke a license of any licensee or a certificate of any certificate holder if the applicant, licensee, or certificate holder:

- (8) Violates the code of ethics adopted by the Board;
- (9) Knowingly violates any provision of this title;
- (13) Violates any rule or regulation adopted by the Board;
- (16) Commits an act of immoral or unprofessional conduct in the practice of clinical or nonclinical counseling or therapy [.]

The Board also charged the Respondent with violating:

Code of Md. Regs. tit.10 § 58.03.

.04 Ethical Responsibility.

A. A counselor shall:

- (7) Maintain accurate records;
- (11) Be familiar with and adhere to this chapter [.]

B. A counselor may not:

- (3) Enter into relationships that could compromise a counselor's objectivity or create a conflict of interest.

.05 The Counseling Relationship.

A. Client Welfare and Rights.

- (2) A counselor may not:
 - (d) Foster dependent counseling relationships.

B. Dual Relationships.

- (1) A counselor shall:
 - (a) Avoid dual relationships with clients; and
 - (b) Take appropriate measures, including but not limited to, informed consent, consultation, supervision, and documentation to ensure that judgment is not impaired and no exploitation occurs if a dual relationship cannot be avoided.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent was and is licensed to practice clinical professional counseling in the State of Maryland.
2. The Respondent was originally issued a license practice as a licensed clinical professional counselor in the State of Maryland on or about February 28, 2000. The Respondent's license expires on January 31, 2018.
3. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent maintained a private practice.

4. In or around August 2014, the Board received a complaint from Complainant A. In the complaint, the complainant ("Complainant A") addressed concerns about the Respondent's recordkeeping, client confidentiality, and boundary issues between the Respondent and a client ("Client A").¹

5. Between 2008 and 2013, the Respondent began counseling Client A. Client A initially sought counseling because Client A was experiencing marital and other family problems.

6. During counseling sessions with Client A, the Respondent learned that Patient A abused alcohol and drugs and suffered from depression and anxiety. The Respondent also learned that Client A self-mutilated and was hospitalized on several occasions for being suicidal.

7. The Respondent originally diagnosed Client A as having a bipolar disorder. After Client A was hospitalized in 2010, the Respondent changed Client A's diagnosis to borderline personality disorder.

8. While counseling Client A, the Respondent: (1) discussed her personal life; (2) purchased lunch for Client A; (3) allowed Client A to bring her lunch to sessions; (4) picked up Client A from her home and drove Client A to counseling sessions; (5) either did not return Client A's telephone calls or did not return Client A's phone calls in a timely fashion; (6) sent Client A personal text messages (7) became Facebook friends with Client A; and (8) took Client A to the hospital when Client A became suicidal.

¹ The name of Complainant A and Client A have been omitted to maintain confidentiality. Their names will be made available to the Respondent upon request.

9. Once the Respondent became Facebook friends with Client A, she began corresponding with Client A through instant messaging.

10. The Respondent also conducted counseling sessions with Client A at restaurants or coffee shops.

11. When counseling ended in November 2013, the Respondent promised Client A that they would keep in touch on Facebook.

12. Several occasions after counseling with Client A ended, the Respondent tried to contact Client A and Client A's friends or family members by Facebook, text messaging, and/or e-mails.

13. In March 2014, Client A began individual therapy with the Complainant.

14. In or around April 2014, the Complainant A requested Client A's treatment records from the Respondent.

16. The Respondent did not respond to Complainant A request for Client A's treatment records until May 2015.

17. On May 6, 2015, the Board investigator conducted an interview under oath with the Respondent.

18. During her interview with the Board investigator, the Respondent admitted that she (1) conducted counseling sessions with Client A in restaurants and coffee shops, (2) paid for Client A's lunch, (3) sent personal texts, e-mails, and Facebook messaging to Client A, (4) became Facebook friends with Client A, (5) did not respond to Complainant A's request for Client A's treatment records, and (6) took Client A to the hospital when Client A became suicidal during a counseling session, instead of calling an ambulance.

19. The Respondent also admitted under oath that she tried to contact Client A after Complainant A filed a complaint with the Board.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact, the Board concludes that the Respondent violated H.O. § 17-509 (8), (9), (13) and (16) and Code of Md. Regs. tit. 10 § 58.03.04 A (7) and (11) and B (3) Code of Md. Regs. tit. 10 § 58.03.05. A (2) (d) and B(1)(a) and (b).

ORDER

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is this 19th day of January 2015, a majority of the full authorized membership of the Board hereby:

ORDERED that the Respondent's license shall be placed on **PROBATION for a period of TWO (2) YEARS** subject to the following conditions:

1. The Respondent shall take and pass a Board approved 3 or 5 credit ethics course that focuses on mental health counseling. The course may not be used to satisfy continuing education credit requirements for renewal.

2. The Respondent's practice shall be under the supervision of a Board approved licensed professional counselor (LCPC) for a period of one year. While the Respondent's practice is under supervision, the Respondent shall ensure that the supervisor submits quarterly reports to the Board. This requirement shall commence upon the Respondent's return to practice. The first quarterly report must be submitted to the Board upon completion of the first three months of the Respondent's return to practice.

ORDERED that at the end of the Respondent's probationary period, the Respondent may file a written petition to the Board for termination of the probationary status and the removal of any conditions or restrictions that resulted from this disciplinary action, if Respondent has fulfilled all the terms and conditions set forth herein, is not in violation of this Order, and there are no outstanding complaints against the Respondent the Board at its discretion may approve the Respondent's petition; and it is further

ORDERED that if the Respondent fails to make any such petition, then the probationary period status may continue indefinitely, subject to the conditions set forth in this Order; and it is further

ORDERED that if the Board determines that the terms or conditions of this Order have not been successfully completed, the Board may modify the terms and conditions of Respondent's probation, upon notice to the Respondent; and it is further

ORDERED that if the Respondent violates any of the terms of this Order, the Board, after notice and a show cause hearing, and a determination of violation, may impose any other disciplinary sanctions it deems appropriate, said violation being proved by a preponderance of evidence; and it is further

ORDERED that Respondent shall be responsible for all costs incurred under this Order; and it is further

ORDERED that the effective date of this Order is the date that it is signed by the Board; and it is further

ORDERED that the content of this document shall be reported to the National Practitioners Data Bank; and it is further

ORDERED that this document constitutes a formal disciplinary action of the Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists is therefore a public document for purposes of public disclosure, pursuant to Md. General Provisions I §§ 4-101 *et seq.* (2014).

1/19/2018
Date

Risa Ganel, LCMFT
RISA GANEL, LCMFT
Board Chair
Maryland Board of Professional Counselors
and Therapists

CONSENT OF MICHELLE L. NORRIS, LCPC

I, Michelle L. Norris, LCPC, by affixing my signature hereto, acknowledge that:

1. I am represented by M. Natalie McSherry, Esquire .
2. I am aware that I am entitled to a formal evidentiary hearing before the Board, pursuant to Md. Code Ann., Health Occ. II. §17-511 (Repl. Vol. 2014) and Md. Code Ann., State Govt. II Code Ann. §§ 10-201 *et seq.* (Repl. Vol. 20014).
3. I acknowledge the validity and enforceability of this Consent Order as if entered after a formal evidentiary hearing in which I would have had the right to counsel, to confront witnesses, to give testimony, to call witnesses on my own behalf, and to all other substantive and procedural protections provided by law. I am waiving those procedural and substantive protections.

4. I voluntarily enter into and consent to the foregoing findings of fact, conclusions of law, and order and agree to abide by the terms and conditions set forth in this Consent Order, as a resolution of the Board's case, based on the findings set forth herein.

5. I waive my right to contest the findings of fact and conclusions of law, and I waive my right to a full evidentiary hearing, and any right to appeal this Consent Order as set forth in Md. Code Ann., Health Occ. II § 17-512 (Rep. Vol. 2014) and Md. Code Ann., State Govt. II. §§ 10-201 *et seq.* (Rep. Vol. 2014).

6. I acknowledge that by failing to abide by the terms and conditions set forth in this Consent Order, and, following proper procedures, I may be subject to disciplinary action.

7. I sign this consent order, without reservation, as my voluntary act and deed. I acknowledge that I fully understand and comprehend the language, meaning, and terms of this Consent Order.

12-19-17
Date

Michelle L. Norris
Michelle L. Norris, LCPC

NOTARY

STATE OF Maryland

CITY/COUNTY OF Carroll

I hereby certify that on this 19th day of December, 2017, before me, a Notary Public for the State of Maryland and the City/County aforesaid, personally

appeared Michelle L. Norris, LCPC and made oath in due form of law that the foregoing Consent Order was his voluntary act and deed.

AS WITNESS my hand and Notarial Seal.



Notary Public

My Commission Expires: 06/2020

06/2020